

# THE CASE OF LITHUANIA AND BELGIUM: TEACHERS AND STUDENTS' SOCIAL COMPETENCE

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## Abstract

Social competence is very important to people in seeking their goals, and it becomes more and more complicated, requiring better knowledge and skills. It is evident that a basic challenge for Europe may become not technologies or business skills but social competence. It can be reached through learning. Educational environment is understood as a complex of learning process, personality of a teacher, learning methods, technologies, means, interreaction of learners. Otherwise, learning is conceived as a social phenomenon where knowledge is gained by sharing, cooperation and communication. Purposeful and attractive learning can take place in any institution (family, school, university, etc.) group or community. Life changes determine new ideas, more effective theories on learning and finding new educational methods.

Cooperation and collaboration is described as the basis of social competence. It is clear that social competence is revealed through learning and other activities. So it is vitally important for young people, striving for independence and becoming a competent citizen. Otherwise, social competence forms necessary skills in fighting challenges, keeping friendly relations, seeking effective learning, joining community or group activity. Using learning methods, are compared Belgian and Lithuanian students' and teachers' interreaction in learning environment.

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**Keywords:** Social competence, communication, cooperation, skills in learning process, methods of group learning

## Introduction

Social human being was and is important in all existential epochs. In his life full of diversity, a human is directly linked to other humans from an early age till the end of life. Although every person is innately different, has different characteristics and personality, intellectual ability, emotional

expressions of faith, efforts, all people have the need for social competence (The definition and Selection of key Competencies, 2005).

Nowadays, the formation of a new twenty-first century society structure, which is changing people's personal, professional and social conditions of existence, more and more frequent are demands from the public and there is a trend of social competence development. First of all, thinking about teachers, who often run initiatives, internal motivation, knowledge, sometimes in interaction with students in strengthening social competence phenomena such as communication and cooperation (Concept Document of the Commission Expert Group on Key Competencies, 2002). It is never too late to improve communication and cooperation culture. The study is based on the principle of comparative analysis of social competence development in the institutions of two countries (Belgium and Lithuania), there are attempts to discuss the research results on social competence, viewed from a European experience.

***The object of the research*** – Belgian and Lithuanian teachers and students' social competence.

***The aim of the empirical research*** is to reveal the Belgian and Lithuanian students and teachers' social competence using a comparative approach and highlighting the methods of communication and cooperation in learning process.

## **Learning process**

Communication (*1 figure*) in our lives takes a very important and significant place, because none of us can live alone. The society would not have been able to survive and live until now, if people had not communicated with each other, and only thanks to all members of society was formed the present society. The modern world, based on technology, is characterized by an increased and perfect society, capable to live together with different nations and ethnic groups, individuals and communities, who are constantly in contact and their relationship is close (*Key competences for lifelong learning. Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council. (2006)*). This relationship requires mutual tolerance and ability to communicate between different groups of people. It is therefore particularly important to foster young, developing intercultural spirit in them, intelligence, based on wisdom.

Man seeks to communicate with others, not only for surviving, but also live, grow and develop as a person. A. Anzenbacher (1992) believes that in order to develop the communication culture, co-operation must be properly explained. This is a way of communication in which two or more persons are able to work together. Cooperation is the ability to work with others. Working together, people have certain goals, they must seek,

therefore, must feel on both sides the effort to achieve the goals. It is necessary to eliminate manifestations of selfishness, in order to achieve common goals, selfishness is the obstacle in achieving common goals.

### **The process of learning**

Collaboration is included in the learning process, thereby creating an environment that allows each student to feel good and involved. It should be noted that the overwhelming cooperation of individual student performance or activity, in contrast, enhances personal self-esteem, motivation for learning to participate in the learning process. Gilbert, R., Bullati, J., Turner, P., Whitehouse, H., (2004) states that cooperation is not only intended to facilitate learning but also in cooperation students learn. One can safely say that the cooperation in the learning process is a learning to learn strategy. Its core is a single teacher - teacher, student - student activities based on their mutual agreement, relations between them, the overall objectives of achieving a common understanding and approach.

*Cooperation oriented to group.* Concept of co-operation based on the personal attitude, values and orientations. In his view, the internal motivation of a group of pupils to achieve the common goal of cooperation is a basis to cooperation foundation. The essential co-factor is a group of pupils sharing not only targets, but also ideas, thoughts, opinions, beliefs, common goals. The student voluntarily in cooperation with other groups of students, feels the inner need for loyalty from others, because of intolerance or violence from others undermines mutual trust (V. Černius, 2009). Also V. Černius (2009) in his scientific work emphasizes the fact that the group originated sociocognitive conflict can improve group of student understanding. Lawrence describes the learning group collaboration as a form that allows heterogeneous group of low-achieving general education goals, based on interactions that encourage each student group to actively participate in joint activities of the task. Learning in groups is social competence development, which is necessary in learning to solve problems together. The Group's activities are achieved and acquired by important characteristics: one of them - ability to listen to one another to provide assistance, support and reinforce one another, and secondly - the joint activities, sharing the responsibility for a common goal.

The education system, like all social systems, as well as those actions is based on coordination of joint objectives. Of course, for personality development is needed cooperation with other groups and individuals or public institutions. In this process, the person is not a passive observer. He is responsible for its sophistication, dynamism and autonomy. In summary, the teaching mission of the learning process, predicated on co-operation is like a director who:

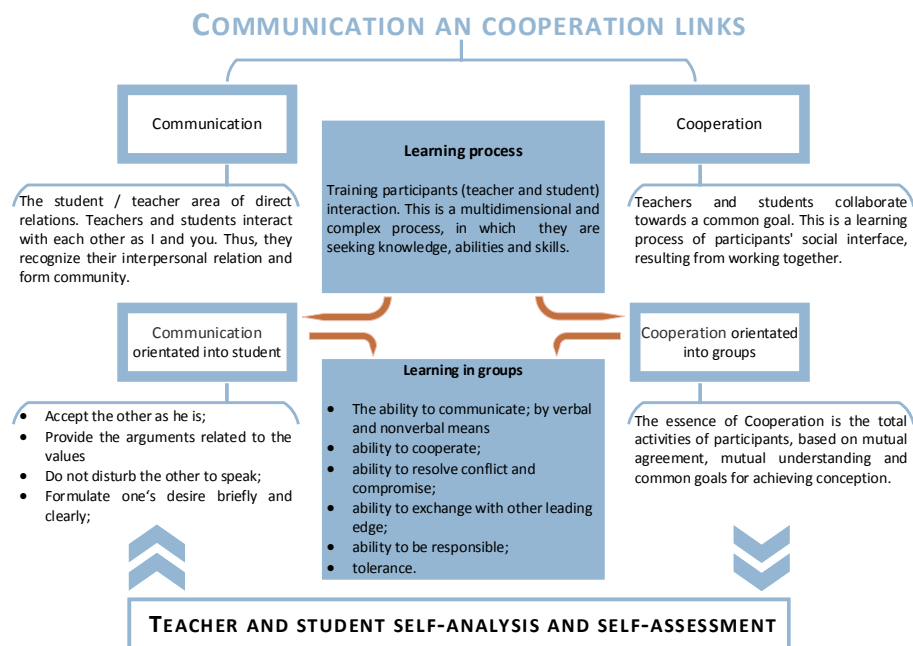
- Develops scenarios of cooperation;
- Provides learning objectives, discussion topics;
- Promotes the learning objectives;
- Develops independent self-evaluation and self-self-assessment.

### Teacher and student participation in the process of self-assessment/self-evaluation

One of the methods which can develop teachers social competence is self-assessment procedure. This procedure can be applied as a professional and a personal assessment tool that includes strong social competence sides. In such self-assessment teachers can identify areas of improvement priorities, to better understand you as a person and a professional teacher. This approach makes a critical look at ourselves and together they can serve as a tool for professional development.

*Student* self-assessment is important for the whole learning process, their motivation, and follow-up. Student self-assessment should:

- respond to the development and growth characteristics;
- provide information about strengths and weaknesses of the development directions;
- promote teaching / learning process development and improvement;
- develop adequate skills for oneself and one's assessment;
- be related to the purpose of outlining a sense of achievement and progress.



1 figure. The process of communication and cooperation links

Self-assessment/self-evaluation is used in student activities process. The student through self-evaluation can describe its perceptions, to reflect on his strategies, compare together approaches. There are three forms of participation in the evaluation process: self-evaluation (narrow sense), the mutual evaluation and overall evaluation (2 figure).



2 figure. The form of student self-evaluation process

The links/relationships between these three forms of self-evaluation ensure that students' participation in the teaching/ learning process and is dynamically regulated by changing teacher training methods. It is recommended to plan and to implement mutual evaluation and co-evaluation forms, combining self-evaluation and preparing recommendations for student's change and development. In other words, the student self-evaluation is the beginning of an interactive participation in the teaching / learning process.

By participating in the learning process, students help to realize each other's needs and express them freely in thinking and creating. Communication and cooperation in cultural development is emphasized in a manifold context. The development of the culture is marked by traditions and innovations, the general origins of cultural interaction, cooperation of the international language of communication in the context of the level of society. Therefore, communication and cooperation skills and their development is a component of social competence. Communicating and acting teachers and students can share experiences with each other, teach each other, to make proposals on how to improve the learning process.

### Student and teacher interactions in classroom

There have been several studies done on the use of active methods by the author as well as other scientists in different countries (R. A. Schmuck, P. A. Schmuck. (1988), V. Černius (2009) M.Tereševičienė, 2003) that showed changes in relationship between teachers and students as well as students between students. Education is humanized in the environment of students. There is a great opportunity for individuality and creativity of each student to flourish. Teacher as well as student must have a possibility to choose the methods that he prefers. As a result, when the realization of the

intellectual, emotional and psychomotor abilities of a teacher who is applying the methods and the students who is using those methods happen, the personal experience takes its wholeness. Nowadays, the scale of learning methods is in fact very wide. This is due to teacher of European and other continents constantly offering new methods that encourage progress in social competencies. As we all know method is meant to measure performance so its selection and the principle of application leads to results. In fact, the teaching/learning process consists of many components, but the method itself performs a function of systematization so the question of the method is always relevant. This shows us that social competencies are essential in each part of life so they should be exercised from the very early days. One of solid methods is working in groups. It is usually applied at schools as well (at least it should be) at universities. Some people might wonder, how social competencies benefit from working in groups. The answer is simple - working in groups is a mean to develop those skills. Working in groups increase the advantages and benefits of social competence undoubtedly high. These features of social competencies are trained in work groups: ability to communicate in verbal and non-verbal, ability to cooperate and the ability to resolve conflicts and find compromises; leadership ability, the ability to be responsible and tolerant.

To summarise, one can say that social competence is our guarantee of survival in this world. Its existence helps us to communicate with other people, develop, acquire new knowledge, career and life satisfaction, in other words, gather to participate in public life.

Dominated by a variety of methods in both of the countries surveyed. It turned out that the planning application and the teacher take a lot of effort and preparation.

## **Research Methodology**

### **Sample**

For practical purposes, we have used the questionnaire for students and teachers in 2 different schools – one from Belgium (Charleroi) and one from Lithuania (Kaunas). The total number of respondents – 300. We can see from the first chart that there were more respondents, either teachers or students, from Lithuania. Most of the respondents both teachers and students were of female sex (1 chart).

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Teachers</b>		<b>Students</b>		<b>All</b>	
<b>Country</b>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Teacher</i>	<i>Student</i>
BELGIUM (Charlaroi)	21	2	68	18	23	86
LITHUANIA (Kaunas)	35	14	102	40	49	142
<b>All respondents</b>	56	16	168	57	<b>72</b>	<b>238</b>
					<b>300</b>	

## The methods

Theoretical and empirical research methods were combined for research analysis. For the analysis the following methods were applied:

- Literature and document analysis helped to highlight the communication and cooperation as fundamental phenomena of the social competence, their importance to human existence, for his/her active social integration and expression in the information society. Formulated methodological attitude of social competence helped constructing the model of empirical development.
- Questionnaire survey method helped to reveal teachers and students' opinion in two countries (Belgium and Lithuania) about the environment, dominating in their institutions, relationship with each other and other communication and cooperation deep phenomena.
- Methods of Mathematical Statistics used to accomplish the results for analysis. Methods, which teacher mostly use in classroom and their differences in the applied analysis of variance (ANOVA) examined the dependence of events using chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) the criteria and measures of communication in relation to the chi-square statistic. Data were processed using Microsoft Excel and SPSS programs.

## Results and discussion

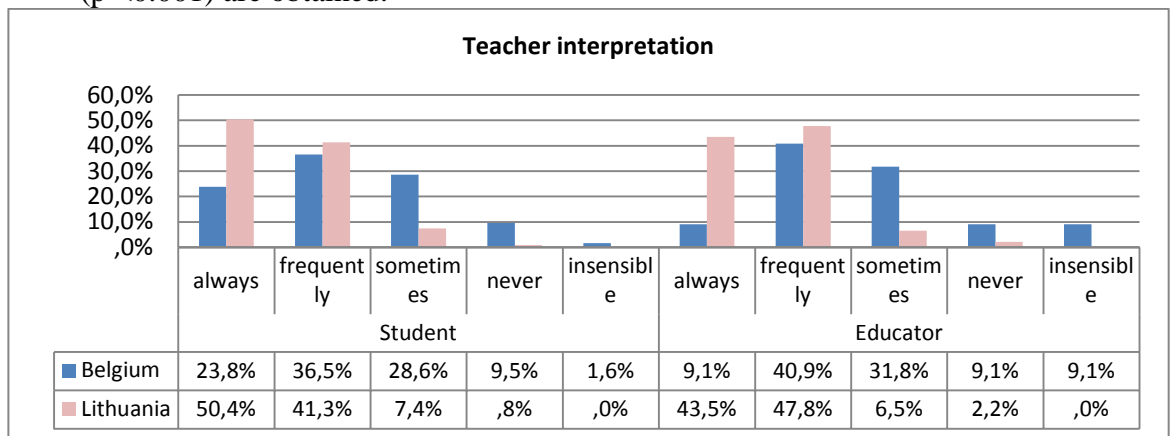
### Methods, which teachers mostly use in classroom

To continue, *Belgian* and *Lithuanian* students were asked to evaluate the methods commonly used by teachers in the class, and asked teachers to choose and how often they choose them, also apply to their lectures. Nine alternative assessment methods were presented by the respondents, who ranged them choosing one of five (*always, frequently, sometimes, never, Insensible*).

Method *Teacher's interpretation* are using *Belgium* and *Lithuania* teachers. *Belgium* 23, 8 % students say that teacher use interpretation always, 36, 5 % students say - frequently, 28, 6 % - sometimes, 9, 5 % – never, 1, 6 % - insensible of that. 9, 1 *Belgian* teachers say that they use interpretation always, 40, 9 % teachers - frequently, 31, 8 % - sometimes, 9, 1 % - never, 9, 1 % teachers – insensible of that.

*Lithuania* 50, 4 % students say that teacher use interpretation always. 41, 3 % - frequently, 7, 4 % - sometimes, 0, 8 % students say that teacher never use interpretation. 43, 5 % teachers say that they use teacher interpretation always, 47, 8 % - frequently, 6, 5 % - sometimes, 2, 2 % - never.

Belgian students (28.6%) and teachers (31.8%) agree with the statement „sometimes“ in a very similar proportion. 9.5% and 9.1% of students and teachers state “never”. In fact, sometimes it is difficult to say when you use and when you do not use *Teacher’s Interpretation method*. Significant differences between comparison students ( $p < 0.000$ ) and teachers ( $p < 0.001$ ) are obtained.



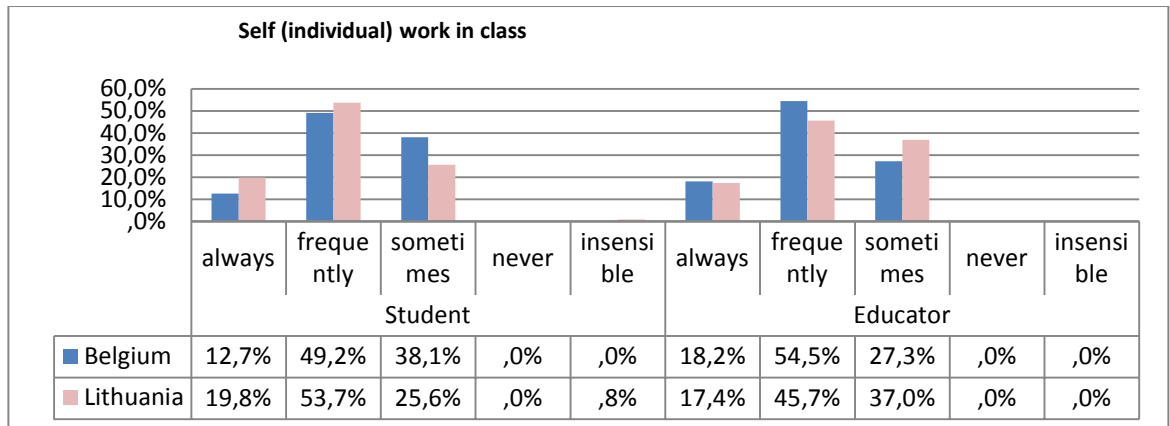
3 fig. Teacher’s interpretation

*Belgium* 12, 7 % students say that they always use self (individual) work in class, 49, 2 % - frequently do that, 38, 1 % - sometimes. 18, 2 % teachers always use self (individual) work in class, 54, 5 % - frequently, 27, 3 % sometimes.

*Lithuania* 19, 8 % students always use self (individual) work in class, 53, 7 % - frequently, 25, 6 % - sometimes do that. 17, 4 % teachers always use self (individual) work in class, 45, 7 % - frequently, 37, 0 % - sometimes do that.

Self method (*individual*) *work-in-class* is almost equally popular in *Belgium* and *Lithuania*. In this case, students and teachers have similar opinions. Results of both countries, students and teachers spread over three rankings (Always, Frequently, sometimes).

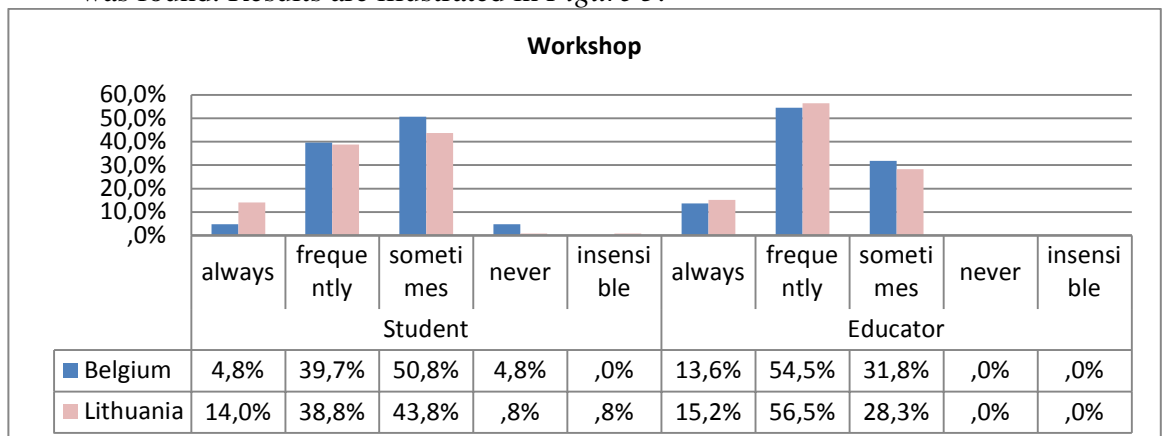




4 fig. Self (individual) work in class

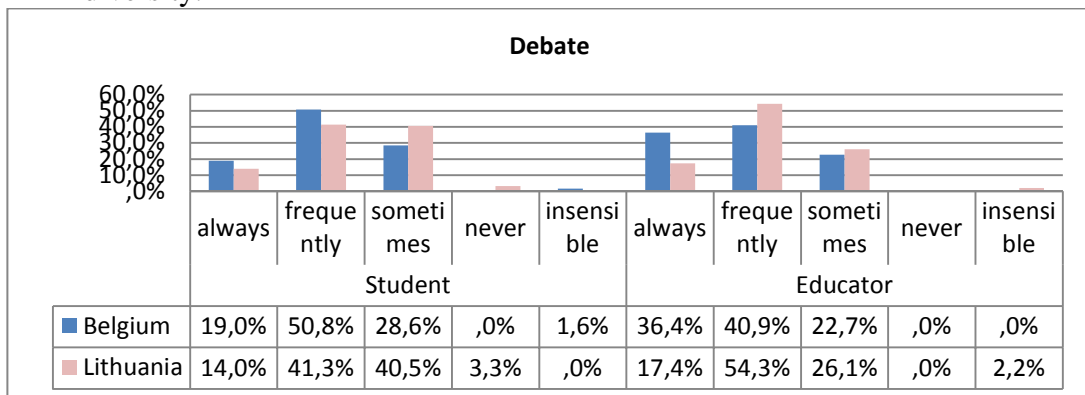
Similar results regarding working in groups were received in both countries between the same groups. In Belgium, 4,8% of the students say, that „They always work in groups“, 39,7% of the students - frequently, 50,8% sometimes and 4,8% never do that. Similar case is observed between teachers. 54.5% of teachers in Belgium as well as 56.5% of Lithuanian teachers support the work-in-group method: 13,6 % of teachers always use this method, 54, 5 % - frequently, 31, 8 % - sometimes do that.

In addition, 14% of Lithuanian students always use this method, 38,8% - frequently, 43,8% sometimes do that and 0,8% of the students - never use this method. 15,2% of Lithuanian teachers always use aforementioned method, 56,5% - frequently do that, 28, 3% of the teachers sometimes use it. No significant difference between students and teachers was found. Results are illustrated in *Figure 5*.



5 fig. Workshop

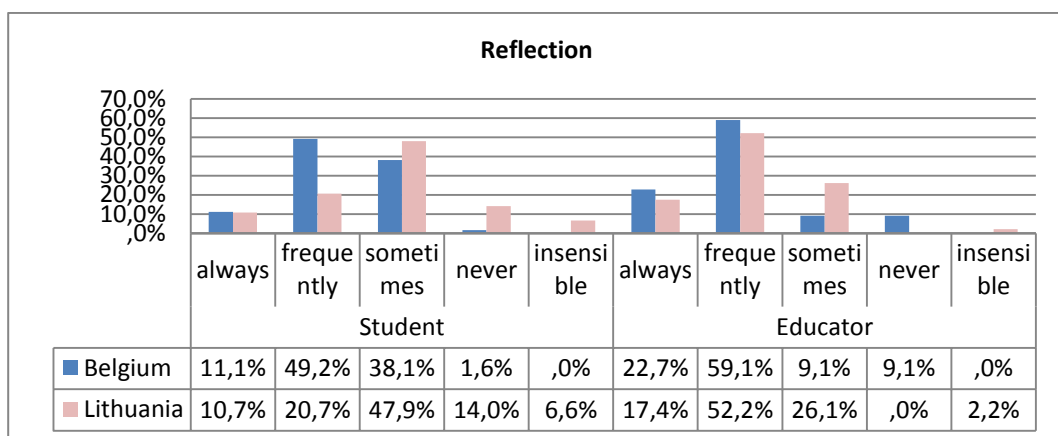
Results show that *Debate* method is important in Belgium as well as Lithuania. The results are illustrated by the percentage distribution of diversity.



6 fig. Debate

36,4% of Belgian teachers, speaking about *Debate* method, choose the answer “always” while in Lithuania only 17,4% choose it. However 54,3% of teachers choose “frequently“. The results of students in both countries are similar. 40,5% of Lithuanian students believe that the method is applicable to „sometimes“, while Belgium there are only 28,6% such students. In Lithuania 14, 0% of students say, that they always use debate, 41, 3% of students choose - frequently, 40, 5% - do that sometimes, 3, 3% say, that they never use debate. What is more, 17, 4 % teachers always use debate, 54, 3 % of educators – frequently and 26, 1 % - sometimes, also, 2, 2 % teachers are insensible of that.

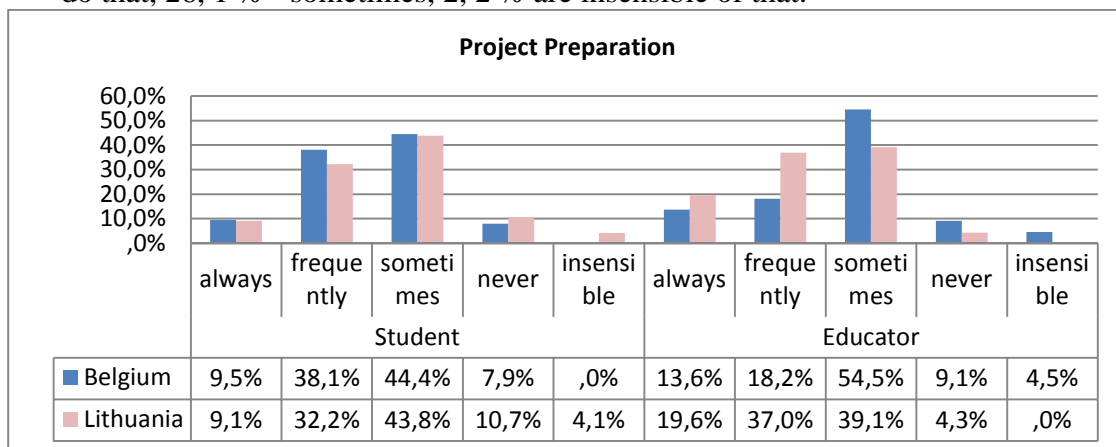
Evaluation of this method, both in students and teachers striking negative responses were observed. Statistically significant differences were found (6 figure ).



7 fig. Reflection

Method Reflection dominance in both countries in respect of students and teachers are similar (*Figure 7*). In Belgium as well as Lithuania the *Reflection* method is used “frequently”, however only part of students think so. According to Student’s criteria significant difference was observed between students from different countries ( $p < 0.000$ ). Belgian and Lithuanian teachers think almost the same as their students do. Similar result between the students of two countries is seen in the following selection, grading „sometimes“ – *Belgium* – 38,1%, *Lithuania* – 47,9%. *Belgium* 11, 1 % students always use reflection, 49, 2 % frequently use reflection, 38, 1 % - sometimes, 1, 6 % - never use reflection. 22, 7 % teachers always use reflection, 59, 1 % teachers – frequently, 9, 1 % teachers - sometimes use reflection.

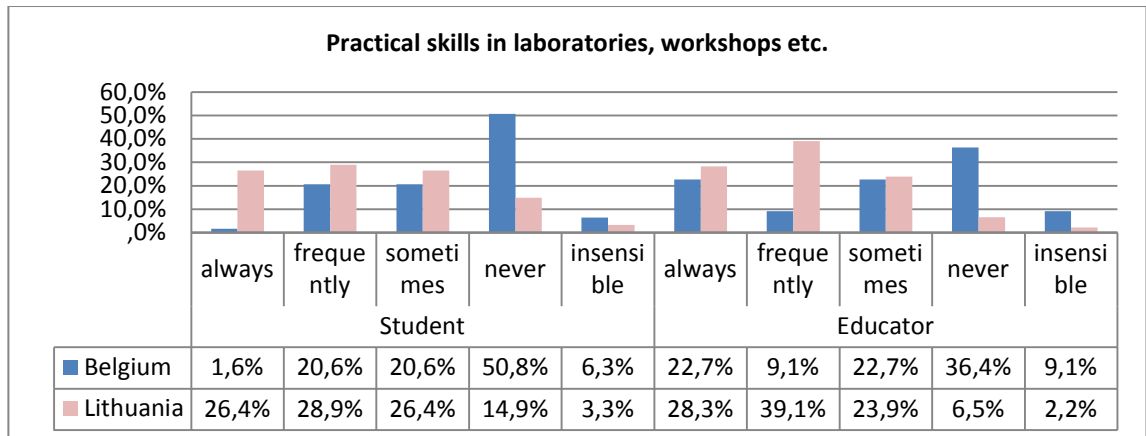
*Lithuania* 10, 7 % students always use reflection, 20, 7 % students frequently use reflection, 47, 9 % - sometimes, 14,0 % – never, 6, 6 % are insensible of that. 17, 4 % teachers always use reflection, 52, 2 % frequently do that, 26, 1 % - sometimes, 2, 2 % are insensible of that.



8 fig. Project Preparation

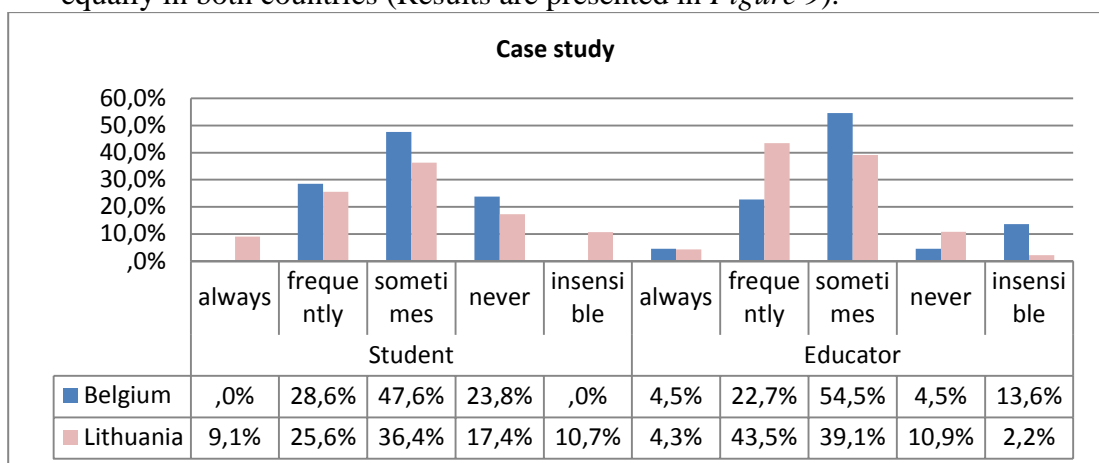
Respondents opinion regarding the *Project preparation* method is similar. *Belgium* 9, 5 % students always use project preparation, 38, 1 % students say that they do that frequently, 44, 4 % students say that they do that sometimes, 7, 9 % students – never use project preparation. 13, 6 % teachers always use project preparation, 18, 2 % teachers – frequently, 54, 5 % teachers - sometimes, 9, 1 % teachers never do that and 4, 5 % are insensible of that.

*Lithuania* 9, 1 % students always use project preparation, 32, 2 % - frequently do that, 43, 8 % - sometimes, 10, 7 % -never and 4, 1 % students are insensible of that. 19, 6 % teachers always use project preparation, 37, 0 % teachers frequently do that, 39, 1 % teachers sometimes do that and 4, 3 % never use project preparation.



9 fig. Practical skills and etc.

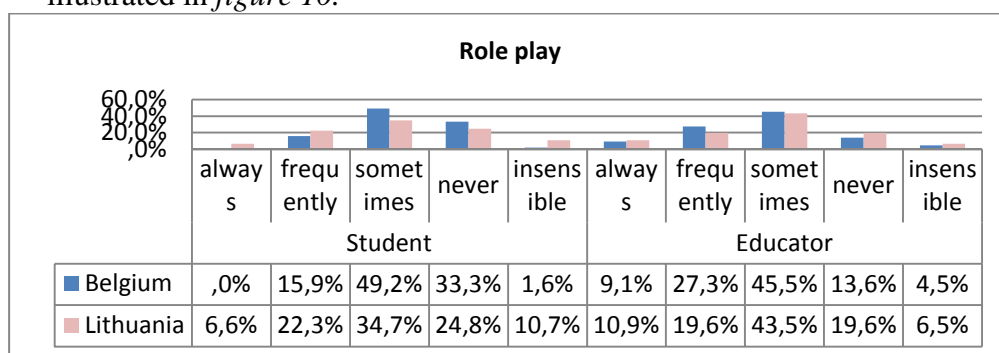
It is believed that the *Practical skills in laboratories, workshops and etc.* method must be applied in highly specific activities. Therefore, enough differences between countries were observed. For example, even in Belgium, 50.8% of students believe that the approach „never“ does not apply, while in Lithuania only 14.9% of students said that the method is not important. It is also interesting that 26.4% of students in Lithuania say that the method is used to „always“. These differences between students confirmed a statistically significant difference ( $p < .000$ ). Other results between students distributes alike. Different results among teachers of both countries were also reported. In Belgium, 36.4% of teachers claim that „never“ does not apply, however in Lithuania 6.5% of the teachers support it. 39.1% of Lithuanian teachers say that „Frequently“ applies most, however, only 9.1% of Belgian teachers picked this answer. The answer “sometimes” is chosen almost equally in both countries (Results are presented in *Figure 9*).



10 fig. Case study

Case study method is not very popular in both countries. There are 28, 6% of students in Belgium that frequently use case studies, while 47, 6% of students say that they use it “sometimes” and 23, 8% of students never do that. 4, 5% of teachers always use case studies, 22, 7% of teachers do that Frequently, 54, 5% of them - sometimes use case studies, 4, 5% - never do that and 13, 6% are insensible of that.

9, 1 % students in *Lithuania* always use *case study*, 25, 6 % frequently do that. 36, 4 % sometimes use *case study* and 17, 4 % never do that, and 10, 7 % are insensible of it. 4, 3 % of teachers always use *case study*, 43, 5 % teachers frequently do it. What is more, 39, 1 % have chosen sometimes, 10, 9 % - never do that, 2, 2 % of teachers are insensible of that. That is validated by a significant difference (  $p < 0,001$ ). The results are illustrated in *figure 10*.



11 fig.Role play

The method of *Role play* does not indicate any particular readings. At the reference of the students and teachers of both countries (*Belgium, Lithuania*) alternative „sometimes“ took the priority.

*Belgium* 15, 9 % students say that they frequently use role play, 49, 2 % students – sometimes, 33, 3 % students – never, 1, 6 % students are insensible of that. 9, 1 % teachers always use role play, 27, 3 % teachers – frequently do that, 45, 5 % teachers – sometimes, 13, 6 % teachers - never, 4, 5 % teachers are insensible of that.

*Lithuania* 6, 6 % students always use role play, 22, 3 % students frequently do that, 34, 7 % students – sometimes, 24, 8 % students – never use role play and 10, 7 % students are insensible of that. 10, 9 teachers always use role play, 19, 6 % teachers – frequently use that method, 43, 5 % teachers – sometimes use role play, 19, 6 % teachers never do that, 6, 5 % teachers are insensible of that. Statistically significant relations are not found (*11 figure*).

## Conclusion

The variety of different learning methods is stressed in all the levels of educational system because it perfects personal social competence. So it is

very important for the teachers to have and use competences of active methods. These competences are not for all life; they should be often revised. The teachers noticed (Belgium, Lithuania) that students' success depends on the success of the other members of the group; collaboration helps to master new material; interreaction among the group members becomes very active (appearance of heterogeneous relation).

The results of the research showed that in both countries (Belgium, Lithuania) group method is very popular. When group members collaborate, they see how important is their role in the group. That is very important for weaker students or those not self-confident. Taking a particular role, they meet better attention and acknowledgement. Thus motivation of each member of the group is encouraged. There less conflicts in the group because the learners see everyone's contribution and rival becomes useless.

The research showed how positive respondents (teachers and students) are about learning methods as they recognise the importance of communication and collaboration, active participation in a group and responsibility for common work. Teachers of both countries (Belgium and Lithuania) agree that group learning develops students' social competence. Thus, cooperation and collaboration is encouraged.

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